

The Free Methodist Church – USA

# 2019 Book of Discipline

“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock  
of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.  
Be shepherds of the church of God, which  
he bought with his own blood”  
(Acts 20:28).

# 2019 BOOK OF DISCIPLINE



free methodist  
church, USA

## **Introduction**

### **Purpose and Character of the Free Methodist Church**

The Free Methodist Church is best understood within the framework of the biblical concept of the church, the perspective provided by its historical heritage and its commitment to meeting human need.

## **Mission Statement**

***“To love God, love people, and make disciples.”***

## **Vision Statement**

***“To bring wholeness to the world through healthy biblical communities of holy people multiplying disciples, leaders, groups, and churches.”***

### **The Biblical Concept of the Church**

It is clear from Scripture that the church is of God and for people. It is His creation. Christ is its head. The church is the people of God chosen for a purposeful partnership in accomplishing the will of God on earth. More than eighty metaphors, word pictures, relating to the church appear in the New Testament. Each portrays a more profound reality than does the picture it brings to mind. The pictures together make clear the nature and mission of the church. Paul speaks of the church as “body,” “building,” and “bride.” The most inclusive and perhaps the most significant metaphor is “body of Christ.” The redeemed are spoken of as “members of the body.”

What is the profound truth that the many word pictures convey? God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – takes a redeemed people into partnership to share in His activities and to realize His purposes. The church is the organic, corporate instrument God has chosen to remake people and society. It has a mission of holy love. The church exists to produce Christlikeness in all people and their institutions. Thus our mission may be described as participation with God in bringing holiness and love to bear upon the sins, hurts, and needs of all people. This description of our mission is both individual and social. It points to a social relationship of all people to God and to each other described in Scripture as “the kingdom of God.”

The metaphors of the New Testament are made emphatic by the greatest portrait of all – the Incarnation, God made flesh. The church, enlightened by the Incarnation, continues the teaching and the ministry of its Lord on earth.

When the church is acting under the headship of its Lord and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, it continues the story begun in the book of Acts. Many are its wonderful achievements since the first century, and many more may yet be realized in the unfolding drama of the acts of the Holy Spirit through redeemed people.

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The New Testament reminds us that the church visible is not the church ideal. Because the church is a divine-human partnership, sharing not only in the holy love of its founder but in the blemishes of its humanity, it is ever in need of renewal. God takes the same risk with the church in redemption as He did when He granted people freedom in creation. Just as God, the Holy Spirit, used the hands of the Apostle Paul in "special miracles" so He can use His church today. The results will be the same – the Word of the Lord will grow mightily and will prevail (Acts 19:11 and 20).

### **Historical Heritage and Perspective**

Free Methodists consider the story of the church in the book of Acts and the other New Testament writings as their primary heritage. Generation after generation derives from this record their main source of direction and renewal. Followers of God have wrestled with issues both old and new throughout the centuries just as they do now. The entire history of the church is instructive for us.

Free Methodists claim a line of evangelical descent spelled out in large terms as follows: They trace their spiritual heritage through men and women of deep personal piety in all ages who have shown that it is possible to maintain the glow of spiritual fervor in the midst of paganism, apostasy, and the ofttime corruption of the established church.

The lineage of the Free Methodist Church begins with the people of God in the Old and New Testaments, and includes influences and contributions from the multitude of renewal movements in western Christianity: Wycliffe and the German Moravians (from whom Wesley learned the concept of "the witness of the Spirit"); the sixteenth century Reformation with its many counterbalancing renewal movements, not the least of which were the Arminian correctives (which taught that Christ's salvation was for all humankind without limit, but that it must be freely chosen); the Catholic-Anglican tradition; the English Puritan influence; the Methodist tradition; and the ensuing vigorous nineteenth century holiness movement. God has used these and others across the ages to make the unchanging Christian gospel known more clearly. In sum, Free Methodists identify with the flow of history of the Christian church while maintaining distinctive evangelical and spiritual emphases.

The contributions from church history may be detailed

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as follows: The Reformation heritage is reflected in their commitment to the Bible as the supreme rule of faith and life, and to salvation by grace through faith.

The Catholic-Anglican heritage appears in their concern for church order and appreciation for liturgical form. Their emphasis on the essentials of the faith allows for their openness towards differing views on such subjects as modes of baptism and the millennium.

The Methodist heritage is shown in theological, ecclesiastical and social concerns articulated by the Reverend John Wesley and his associates in the eighteenth century and reaffirmed through the holiness movement of the nineteenth.

Theologically, they are committed to the Wesleyan-Arminian affirmation of the saving love of God in Christ. Through prevalent grace He seeks to bring every individual to himself but grants to each the responsibility of accepting or rejecting that salvation. Salvation is a living relationship with God in Jesus Christ, giving the believer a legal position of righteousness, and therefore affirming the security of all who continue in fellowship with Him. Along with the Arminian emphasis on the universal offer of salvation, John Wesley rediscovered the principle of assurance through the witness of the Holy Spirit. He declared a scriptural confidence in a God who is able to cleanse the hearts of believers from sin here and now by faith, fill them with the Holy Spirit, and empower them for carrying out His mission in the world. John Wesley wrote of Himself and his brother Charles, "In 1729 two young men in England, reading the Bible, saw they could not be saved without holiness, followed after it, and incited others so to do. In 1737 they saw, likewise, that men are justified before they are sanctified; but still holiness was their object. God then thrust them out to raise up a holy people."

Ecclesiastically, the Methodist heritage is continued in Free Methodist organization. At its most basic level, Free Methodist organize as local churches and have named them "societies." In so doing, they follow early Methodist practice, and designate the local church as a transformed and transforming society. The local church constitutes a "society" different from the societies of the world. Thus, in the pages that follow, we use the term "society" to refer to Free Methodist churches in their local settings.

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There are lines of responsibility connecting local, district, conference, and denominational ministries. Small groups of believers are accountable to one another for growth in Christian life and service. Free Methodists are concerned for the whole church, not just the local congregation. They value the leadership of bishops, superintendents, pastors, and lay leaders who provide counsel and direction to the church.

Born at a time when representative government was being developed by free societies, the Free Methodist founders reaffirmed the biblical principle of lay ministry. Free Methodists recognize and license unordained persons for particular ministries. They mandate lay representation in numbers equal to clergy in the councils of the church.

Socially, from their early days, Free Methodists displayed an awakened conscience characteristic of the early Wesleyan movement. Their outspoken action against the institution of slavery and the class distinction inherent in the rental of pews to the wealthy demonstrated the spirit of true Methodism. Although issues change, the sensitive social conscience remains, evidenced by continuing active participation in the social concerns of the day.

During the nineteenth century, the holiness movement, arising in American Methodism but spreading through other nations and denominations, called Christians to deeper levels of relationship with God and greater concern for the needs of hurting humanity. Within this context, the Reverend Benjamin T. Roberts and other ministers and laypersons in the Genesee Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in western New York, raised a protest against theological liberalism, unhealthy compromise on pressing social issues and loss of spiritual fervor.

Between 1858 and 1860, a number of these leaders were excluded from the Methodist Episcopal Church on various charges and allegations. In reality, the primary issue was their proclamation of the basic principles of Methodism, especially the doctrine and experience of entire sanctification. Appeals made to the General Conference of May 1860 were denied. Those excluded could not join any other Methodist body, for there was none that agreed with them on the issues on which they were thrust out. Therefore, the Free Methodist Church was organized by a convention of lay members and ministers which met at Pekin, Niagara County, New York, on August 23, 1860. The first General Conference met on the second Wednesday of

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October, 1862, at Saint Charles, Illinois.

The Free Methodist Church, since its inception, continues to expand around the world through missionary outreach, the development of additional general conferences and a coordinating world organization.

### **The Needs of Persons**

Free Methodists are committed to the task of understanding the most important needs of persons, institutions and varying cultures so that it may minister meaningfully and redemptively to them. In the high priestly prayer of Jesus Christ, He called upon believers to live in this world actively and intelligently in order that the world might be led both to "know" and to "believe."

Free Methodists are aware of the demonic forces in the world which debase people, pervert the good and lead people and institutions to ruin. They attempt to help people by restoring personal meaning in a time of depersonalizing developments.

Free Methodists openly rebuke anything in law, persons or institutions which violates the dignity of persons created in the image of God. They are committed to taking advantage of opportunities where as individuals, societies, conferences and denomination they can minister healing and redemptive helpfulness in the world.

### **Distinctive Principles**

Free Methodists seek to express the concept of the church of Jesus Christ, their historical perspective and the needs of persons in specific principles and commitments.

Free Methodists today seek to continue the mission of first-century Christianity which was recovered by John Wesley and the early Methodists who declared they existed "to raise up a holy people."

Free Methodists are a fellowship of Christians in earnest to get to heaven and committed to working in the world for the salvation of all people. They place their commitment to Christ and His church above all others. They keep themselves free from alliances that would compete for their highest loyalty and

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from all that would encumber and compromise their effective witness to the Trinitarian faith and the believer's dependence upon the grace of God. The Christian denies self, takes up their cross daily, and follows Jesus. They conform to all the will of God as made known in His Word, and believes the conditions of salvation are the same now as they were in the days of the apostles.

In doctrine, Free Methodists' beliefs are the standard beliefs of evangelical, Arminian Protestantism, with distinctive emphasis on the scriptural teaching of entire sanctification as held by John Wesley.

In experience, Free Methodists stress the reality of an inner cleansing and power that attests the doctrine of entire sanctification, both in the inward consciousness of believers and in their outward life.

Their worship is characterized by simplicity and freedom of the Spirit, untrammelled by elaborate ritual.

Free Methodists maintain a life of daily devotion to Christ that springs from inward holiness and separates the Christian from the world, even while he/she lives in the world. They believe the best way to keep worldliness from invading the church is for the church to invade the world with redemptive purpose.

They practice a complete consecration of every power and possession to the service of God and all people everywhere. They believe so strongly in the mission of the church that they are committed to responsible stewardship in finance. Therefore they do not need to resort to commercial efforts to support the cause of Christ.

Free Methodists recognize that God gives spiritual gifts of service and leadership to both men and women. Since male and female are both created in the image of God, that image is most fully reflected when both women and men work in concert at all levels of the church. Therefore, all positions in the church are accessible to any whom God has called.

Free Methodists sense a special obligation to preach the gospel to the poor. The provisions of the gospel are for all. The "glad tidings" must be proclaimed to every individual of the human race. God sends the true light to illuminate and melt every heart. Jesus set the example. Of His ministry it was reported,

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"The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them." This preaching to the poor was the crowning proof that He was the one who should come. In this respect the church must follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

Free Methodists are committed to the New Testament ideals of simplicity and modesty as a style of life. They wish to call attention, not to themselves, but to their Lord.

These distinctives of the Free Methodist Church from its origin are still living issues. In every era and every land these distinctives are the witnesses of the church, needing utterance clear and strong that they may be heard and heeded amidst the world's confusing and misleading voices.

## Chapter 1

### The Constitution of the Free Methodist Church

#### Preamble

¶100 In order that we may wisely preserve and pass on to posterity the heritage of doctrine and principles of Christian living transmitted to us as evangelicals in the Arminian-Wesleyan tradition, ensure church order by sound principles and ecclesiastical polity, and prepare the way for evangelization of the world and the more effective cooperation with other branches of the church of Christ in the advancement of Christ's kingdom, we, the ministers and lay members of the Free Methodist Church, in accordance with constitutional procedure, do hereby ordain, establish and set forth the following as the Constitution of the Free Methodist Church.

#### Articles of Religion – God

##### The Holy Trinity

¶102 There is but one living and true God, the maker and preserver of all things. And in the unity of this Godhead there are three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three are one in eternity, deity and purpose; everlasting, of infinite power, wisdom and goodness.

##### The Son – His Incarnation

¶103 God was Himself in Jesus Christ to reconcile people to God. Conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, He joined together the deity of God and the humanity of humankind. Jesus of Nazareth was God in flesh, truly God and truly human. He came to save us. For us the Son of God suffered, was crucified, dead and buried. He poured out His life as a blameless sacrifice for our sin and transgressions. We gratefully acknowledge that He is our Savior, the one perfect mediator between God and us.

##### The Son – His Resurrection and Exaltation

¶104 Jesus Christ is risen victorious from the dead. His resurrected body became more glorious, not hindered by ordinary human limitations. Thus He ascended into heaven. There He sits as our exalted Lord at the right hand of God the Father, where He intercedes for us until all His enemies shall be brought into complete subjection. He will return to judge all people. Every knee will bow and every tongue confess Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

**The Holy Spirit – His Person**

¶105 The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. Proceeding from the Father and the Son, He is one with them, the eternal Godhead, equal in deity, majesty and power. He is God effective in Creation, in life and in the church. The Incarnation and ministry of Jesus Christ were accomplished by the Holy Spirit. He continues to reveal, interpret and glorify the Son.

**The Holy Spirit – His Work in Salvation**

¶106 The Holy Spirit is the administrator of the salvation planned by the Father and provided by the Son's death, resurrection and ascension. He is the effective agent in our conviction, regeneration, sanctification and glorification. He is our Lord's ever-present self, indwelling, assuring and enabling the believer.

**The Holy Spirit – His Relation to the Church**

¶107 The Holy Spirit is poured out upon the church by the Father and the Son. He is the church's life and witnessing power. He bestows the love of God and makes real the lordship of Jesus Christ in the believer so that both His gifts of words and service may achieve the common good and build and increase the church. In relation to the world He is the Spirit of truth, and His instrument is the Word of God.

**The Scriptures****Authority**

¶108 The Bible is God's written Word, uniquely inspired by the Holy Spirit. It bears unerring witness to Jesus Christ, the living Word. As attested by the early church and subsequent councils, it is the trustworthy record of God's revelation, completely truthful in all it affirms. It has been faithfully preserved and proves itself true in human experience.

The Scriptures have come to us through human authors who wrote, as God moved them, in the languages and literary forms of their times. God continues, by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, to speak through this Word to each generation and culture.

The Bible has authority over all human life. It teaches the truth about God, His creation, His people, His one and only Son and the destiny of humankind. It also teaches the way of salvation and the life of faith. Whatever is not found in the Bible nor can be proved by it is not to be required as an article of belief or as necessary to salvation.

**Authority of the Old Testament**

¶109 The Old Testament is not contrary to the New. Both Testaments

bear witness to God's salvation in Christ; both speak of God's will for His people. The ancient laws for ceremonies and rites, and the civil precepts for the nation Israel are not necessarily binding on Christians today. But, on the example of Jesus we are obligated to obey the moral commandments of the Old Testament.

The books of the Old Testament are: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, The Song of Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

**New Testament**

¶110 The New Testament fulfills and interprets the Old Testament. It is the record of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. It is God's final word regarding humankind, sin, salvation, the world and its destiny.

The books of the New Testament are: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude, Revelation.

**Humankind****Free Moral Persons**

¶111 God created human beings in His own image, innocent, morally free and responsible to choose between good and evil, right and wrong. By the sin of Adam, humans as the offspring of Adam are corrupted in their very nature so that from birth they are inclined to sin. They are unable by their own strength and work to restore themselves in right relationship with God and to merit eternal salvation. God, the Omnipotent, provides all the resources of the Trinity to make it possible for humans to respond to His grace through faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. By God's grace and help people are enabled to do good works with a free will.

**Law of Life and Love**

¶112 God's law for all human life, personal and social, is expressed in two divine commands: Love the Lord God with all your heart, and love your neighbor as yourself. These commands reveal what is best for persons in their relationship with God, others and society. They set forth the principles of human duty in both individual and social action. They recognize God as the only Sovereign. All people as created by Him and in His

image have the same inherent rights regardless of gender, race or color. All should therefore give God absolute obedience in their individual, social and political acts. They should strive to secure to everyone respect for their person, their rights and their greatest happiness in the possession and exercise of the right within the moral law.

### **Good Works**

¶113 Good works are the fruit of faith in Jesus Christ, but works cannot save us from our sins nor from God's judgment. As expressions of Christian faith and love, our good works performed with reverence and humility are both acceptable and pleasing to God. However, good works do not earn God's grace.

## **Salvation**

### **Christ's Sacrifice**

¶114 Christ offered once and for all the one perfect sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. No other satisfaction for sin is necessary; none other can atone.

### **New Life in Christ**

¶115 A new life and a right relationship with God are made possible through the redemptive acts of God in Jesus Christ. God, by His Spirit, acts to impart new life and put people into a relationship with Himself as they repent and their faith responds to His grace. Justification, regeneration, adoption, sanctification and restoration speak significantly to entrance into and continuance in the new life.

### **Justification**

¶116 Justification is a legal term that emphasizes that by a new relationship in Jesus Christ people are in fact accounted righteous, being freed from both the guilt and the penalty of their sins.

### **Regeneration**

¶117 Regeneration is a biological term which illustrates that by a new relationship in Christ, one does in fact have a new life and a new spiritual nature capable of faith, love and obedience to Christ Jesus as Lord. The believer is born again and is a new creation. The old life is past; a new life is begun.

### **Adoption**

¶118 Adoption is a filial term full of warmth, love, and acceptance. It denotes that by a new relationship in Christ believers have become His wanted children freed from the mastery of both sin and Satan. Believers have the witness of the Spirit that they are children of God.

### **Sanctification**

¶119 Sanctification is that saving work of God beginning with new life in Christ whereby the Holy Spirit renews His people after the likeness of God, changing them through crisis and process, from one degree of glory to another, and conforming them to the image of Christ.

As believers surrender to God in faith and die to self through full consecration, the Holy Spirit fills them with love and purifies them from sin. This sanctifying relationship with God remedies the divided mind, redirects the heart to God, and empowers believers to please and serve God in their daily lives.

Thus, God sets His people free to love Him with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love their neighbor as themselves.

### **Restoration**

¶120 Christians may be sustained in a growing relationship with Jesus as Savior and Lord. However, they may grieve the Holy Spirit in the relationships of life without returning to the dominion of sin. When they do, they must humbly accept the correction of the Holy Spirit, trust in the advocacy of Jesus, and mend their relationships.

Christians can sin willfully and sever their relationship with Christ. Even so by repentance before God, forgiveness is granted and the relationship with Christ restored, for not every sin is the sin against the Holy Spirit and unpardonable. God's grace is sufficient for those who truly repent and, by His enabling, amend their lives. However, forgiveness does not give believers liberty to sin and escape the consequences of sinning.

God has given responsibility and power to the church to restore penitent believers through loving reproof, counsel and acceptance.

## **The Church**

### ¶121

The church is created by God. It is the people of God. Christ Jesus is its Lord and Head. The Holy Spirit is its life and power. It is both divine and human, heavenly and earthly, ideal and imperfect. It is an organism, not an unchanging institution. It exists to fulfill the purposes of God in Christ. It redemptively ministers to persons. Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it that it should be holy and without blemish. The church is a fellowship of the redeemed and the redeeming, preaching the Word of God and administering the sacraments according to Christ's instruction. The Free Methodist Church purposes to be representative of what the church of Jesus Christ should be



on earth. It therefore requires specific commitment regarding the faith and life of its members. In its requirements it seeks to honor Christ and obey the written Word of God.

### **The Language of Worship**

¶122 According to the Word of God and the custom of the early church, public worship and prayer and the administration of the sacraments should be in a language understood by the people.

### **The Holy Sacraments**

¶123 Water baptism and the Lord's Supper are the sacraments of the church commanded by Christ. They are means of grace through faith, tokens of our profession of Christian faith, and signs of God's gracious ministry toward us. By them, He works within us to quicken, strengthen and confirm our faith.

### **Baptism**

¶124 Water baptism is a sacrament of the church, commanded by our Lord, signifying acceptance of the benefits of the atonement of Jesus Christ to be administered to believers as declaration of their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior.

Baptism is a symbol of the new covenant of grace as circumcision was the symbol of the old covenant; and, since infants are recognized as being included in the atonement, they may be baptized upon the request of parents or guardians who shall give assurance for them of necessary Christian training. They shall be required to affirm the vow for themselves before being accepted into church membership.

### **The Lord's Supper**

¶125 The Lord's Supper is a sacrament of our redemption by Christ's death. To those who rightly, worthily and with faith receive it, the bread which we break is a partaking of the body of Christ; and likewise the cup of blessing is a partaking of the blood of Christ. The supper is also a sign of the love and unity that Christians have among themselves.

Christ, according to His promise, is really present in the sacrament. But His body is given, taken and eaten only after a heavenly and spiritual manner. No change is effected in the element; the bread and wine are not literally the body and blood of Christ. Nor is the body and blood of Christ literally present with the elements. The elements are never to be considered objects of worship. The body of Christ is received and eaten in faith.

## **Last Things**

### **The Kingdom of God**

¶126 The kingdom of God is a prominent Bible theme providing Christians with both their tasks and hope. Jesus announced its presence. The kingdom is realized now as God's reign is established in the hearts and lives of believers.

The church, by its prayers, example and proclamation of the gospel, is the appointed and appropriate instrument of God in building His kingdom.

But the kingdom is also future and is related to the return of Christ when judgment will fall upon the present order. The enemies of Christ will be subdued; the reign of God will be established; a total cosmic renewal, which is both material and moral, shall occur; and the hope of the redeemed will be fully realized.

### **The Return of Christ**

¶127 The return of Christ is certain and may occur at any moment, although it is not given us to know the hour. At His return He will fulfill all prophecies concerning His final triumph over all evil. The believer's response is joyous expectation, watchfulness, readiness and diligence.

### **Resurrection**

¶128 There will be a bodily resurrection from the dead of both the just and the unjust, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation. The resurrected body will be a spiritual body, but the person will be whole and identifiable. The Resurrection of Christ is the guarantee of resurrection unto life to those who are in Him.

### **Judgment**

¶129 God has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness in accordance with the gospel and our deeds in this life.

### **Final Destiny**

¶130 Our eternal destiny is determined by God's grace and our response, not by arbitrary decrees of God. For those who trust Him and obediently follow Jesus as Savior and Lord, there is a heaven of eternal glory and the blessedness of Christ's presence. But for the finally impenitent there is a hell of eternal suffering and of separation from God.